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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/25/2017

TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL TU CY EUN

SUBJECT: DAS BRYZA, AMB DAVUTOGLU DISCUSS WAY FORWARD ON CYPRUS, ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE

REF: A. 06 ANKARA 2048

1B. ISTANBUL 136

1C. 06 ATHENS 1155

Classified By: Consul General Deborah K. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. During a June 15 meeting in Istanbul, EUR DAS Matt Bryza and Prime Ministry senior advisor Ahmet Davutoglu discussed ways forward on Cyprus in the run up to the December 2008 EU Commission report on Turkey's accession process. Davutoglu argued that the current government was unlikely to make any further concessions and that any successor government would be equally constrained on Cyprus. Davutoglu also complained that Greek intransigence on Muslim rights in Western Thrace hampered Turkey's ability to move forward on re-opening Halki Seminary. But, he suggested that after Turkey's parliamentary and presidential elections, we consider returning to the "package approaches" to Cyprus and Halki that the USG and GOT were exploring last summer. End Summary.

HALKI SEMINARY

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12. (C) EUR DAS Bryza and Turkish Prime Ministry foreign policy advisor Ahmet Davutoglu revisited earlier discussions (Ref A) of re-opening Halki Seminary during their June 15 meeting in Istanbul. Prompted by Bryza for a clarification on opening the Greek Orthodox community's Halki Seminary (Ref B), Davutoglu claimed that, had the Greeks followed through with offering real minority rights to the Muslim minority in Western Thrace, Turkey would have permitted the opening of Halki Seminary. Davutoglu said Turkish Foreign Minister Gul had offered this tradeoff to Greek Foreign Minister Bakoyannis on the basis of the package approach Davutoglu and Bryza had formulated last summer, according to which the Greek Government would appoint a secular judge to govern the Muslim minority's legal affairs, while the Muslim community would elect its own mufti to govern religious affairs. Unfortunately, after Prime Minister Erdogan's May 2006 visit to Greece, Greek Prime Minister Papoulias had neither reciprocated by visiting Turkey nor offered substantial minority rights for Muslims living in Western Thrace, particularly the right to elect muftis with both religious and civil authority. Though Muslims may elect religious representatives, the appointment of muftis with civil authority rests with the government in Athens. Foreign Minister Gul had explained this to his Greek counterpart, Foreign Minister Bakoyannis. So far, the GOT remained disappointed by the results.

WORKING CYPRUS BEFORE DECEMBER 2008

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13. (C) Bryza suggested, by taking pre-emptive steps, Turkey

could avoid being backed into a difficult corner with the EU and face European demands to open Turkish ports to Greek Cypriot shipping if Turkey is to keep its EU accession bid on track at the European Council meeting in December 2008.

Davutoglu said the current government in Turkey could make no new concessions before elections, and its successor government would be unlikely to make further concessions.

"What did we win by making concessions in the past?" asked Davutoglu. Turkey's European allies had made mistakes since 2004 and the atmosphere in Turkey today was much less conducive to further compromise. The governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) feels strong political pressure ahead of July elections, being cast as "too close to the West" - the U.S. and EU - as well as for one-sided concessions on Cyprus. There were so many promises to the Northern Cypriots. They kept their promises, as had Turkey, but the EU did not.

¶4. (C) At one point, Davutoglu wondered if Cyprus were solved, if the EU wouldn't demand even more from Turkey. The EU was right about its aquis but mistaken on the political methods that led to bringing Greek Cypriots into the EU without first achieving a settlement on the island. Greek Cypriots now felt no need to make any compromises with respect to their Turkish Cypriot neighbors. If, however, that atmosphere could be changed, Davutoglu said, Turkey might yet have some room for political maneuver at home. Some sort of recognition that the Turkish Cypriots were not "criminals" would be helpful - perhaps a sporting or cultural event, or direct airline flights. But Turks were rightly disappointed. Former French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe had told them that if Turkish Cypriots voted "yes," on the Annan plan, they would enjoy the same rights as Greek Cypriots. They voted "yes." And they are still waiting.

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¶5. (C) The bottom line, Davutoglu explained, was that either Turkish Cypriots would be accepted as equal to Greek Cypriots in a new state or there would be de facto separation of the two communities. This was not a Turkish strategy, it was a fact. The Turkish Cypriot community and Turks were thinking along similar lines. If Greek Cypriots could understand this, it was possible this reality could convince them to work in good faith toward a workable solution. It would help, Davutoglu said, if the international community could bring itself to verbally criticize Turkey but punish the Greek Cypriots for once. Turkey - and Turkish Cypriot leader Talat - could not accept a dramatic departure from the Annan plan. DAS Bryza wondered if the Turkish Cypriots could again get one step ahead of the competition. Given current political realities and personalities, Davutoglu thought not. But Davutoglu did suggest that, after Turkish elections, the USG and GOT return to the "package approach" discussed last summer and involving Famagusta-Varosha, as well as Ercan Airport, and possible other sweeteners for Greek Cypriots.

¶6. (C) Comment. Davutoglu's narrow focus on reciprocal measures and a Turkish sense of the EU continually moving goal posts does not augur well for progress on these issues until the passage of Turkey's parliamentary and presidential elections. End comment.

¶7. (U) This cable was cleared by DAS Bryza.  
JONES